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ABSTRACT

The first Teacher Center in Minneapolis was developed in 1972 to meet the training needs of faculty and parents in the Southeast Alternatives sector. A year later, the center joined with the University of Minnesota and began to participate in new curriculum development at both the school and college level, blending preservice and inservice training. The unique aspect of the Minneapolis teacher centers is that the consumers (teachers, principals, or parents) determine to a great extent what they need to know and how they want to get it. By submitting a brief written proposal, they ask a governing board of teachers and parents for the money and means to get the desired training. This model encourages risk-taking, because no one has to admit a professional deficiency to those higher in the administrative structure. Although the Teacher Center arranges for training, the training takes place in a variety of settings. Training is for varying periods of time, depending on the project. The Teacher Center serves as an influence agency for the development of the school's programs, but it has no controlling role over the administration of a given school. (Author/JG)

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STATEMENT

by

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before the

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION PANEL

at the

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS CONVENTION

Dallas, February 24, 1975

on

THE TEACHER CENTER AS A STRATEGY FOR LOCAL SCHOOL RENEWAL

I want to make clear at the outset that whatever representations there are here that seem worthy and good are the product of people from Minneapolis who aren't here today. I wish you could come and talk with them directly and see the Teacher Center in operation - and you are welcome. Through the NIE grant and the Experimental Schools grant we have facilities for meeting you and escorting you through the programs that are going on, and for providing you with good and detailed background information.

Let me make three or four points very quickly. The school district which I represent has 55,600 students. It is losing enrollment at about the same rate as the suburbs. It has about 90 teaching spaces or buildings of one type or another, and a faculty of 3,300. It is very well supported, by comparison with other major cities, in terms of maintenance budget. It is decentralized. There are three area superintendents who exercise the authority of the superintendent, and I mean do exercise that authority, sometimes even to the point where I sit behind my desk and bite my nails because I would rather be

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out there on the line. If you have not decentralized, I ask you as superintendents to keep in mind that you will have to adjust your life-styles also, if you are going to give the authority and the power for the exercise of that discretion in the field. The three decentralized areas are similar; each with about 19,000 students, and approximately equal distribution of minority and low-income populations.

In addition to these areas there is a fourth area -- the Experimental Schools area -- which embraces a sector of the city closest to the University of Minnesota. We have had an excellent relationship with the University because Dean Merwin and his colleagues understand city schools and are concerned and involved and participate with us. The Experimental Schools Project, called Southeast Alternatives, now in its fourth year, was designed to create the opportunity for educational alternative - not option, but alternative. There is a distinction to be made.

For the past four years, then, in that Southeast area where there are approximately 2,100 students, the parents have selected the style of education they desired for their children - an open school, a free school, a traditional or conventional school, or a continuous progress school. The school district made the arrangements for the accommodation of that type of learning and teaching.

In September, 1974, a total of 7,750 elementary students in Minneapolis made the choice of where they would go to school, based on three of the Southeast models. The model which we didn't duplicate was the Free School, because that

still has absorptive capacity.

As a process requirement for making our school system responsive to a changing, multiple clientele, the notion of inservice and staff development has been paramount. It was to this purpose that the initial NIE grant included funds for development of the Teacher Center to support the Southeast Alternatives Project. Approximately eight months ago, we secured an additional NIE grant for the creation of a second Teacher Center.

I have learned that when one talks to alternatives, or even option, which is a lesser degree, in my judgment, of alternative choice in educational style, one is really talking to the issue of governance; one is really talking to the issue of the sharing of power. I cannot emphasize that point too strongly as I describe to you what has happened in Minneapolis.

The second Teacher Center, which is in one of our three major decentralized areas -- the East Area -- embraces four schools and incorporates some of the work which was accomplished in the past two years as a result of experiences in the Southeast Area. In this East Area,this year, 4,500 students and their parents selected a style of learning . . . contemporary, continuous progress or modified open. The East Area Teacher Center provided faculty with the retraining needed to make this possible.

In the last five years, if not the last decade, many, many new demands have been placed on schools. In Minneapolis this certainly has been true, and some of the things we have committed to have required us to have sort of a constant ferment,

a constant welling up of the potential of new ideas, new attitudes, new approaches and new concepts. These have included the commitment of the Board by unanimous vote to alternatives for all children in our city school district by September 1976; and a reaffirmation in terms of the capacity of our district to insure that our children learn adequate communication and comprehension skills of all kinds and positive self-image. We are in the midst of what we believe is a successful - although not perfect -- desegregation move in our city. It is a volunteer program from the point of view of the School Board; that is, we produced our own plan for desegregation and mandated it on community. Then we were taken to court for not moving fast enough. But the federal court accepted our multi-phased plan, and we are now in the third year of this phase-in, which has required the changing of boundaries, the changing of school organization, the moving of children. About 12,000 students are moving by bus in our city for the purpose of desegregation.

We have concurrently begun a frontal attack on the issue of individual and institutional racism. A task force of faculty and citizens has produced a report which is significant and impressive. I was a participant in the development of that study. It also has been of sufficient concern to me to have had me slow down in the administrative management of that particular report for several months; long enough so that last week some of my greatest colleagues called a rump session and invited me and thanked me for not moving faster to provide more administrative direction with respect to the issue of institutional and individual racism.

Desegregation/integration, alternatives, and decentralization have been major changes. And there have been other changes. We have created a very, very significant, small but impressive Department of Women's Studies and its staff has produced significant information requiring many of our faculty and administrators to alter their approach toward those statements and those behaviors which have contributed to what my colleagues call "blatant sexism."

There is now, for the second year, a Department of Indian Education; I think the only one in the nation which has its major source of support from local school district funds.

Progress has been made in all of these areas, including a transcending commitment to the notion of improving human relationships. With all of these concurrent changes in the public schools of Minneapolis, there has been a need for a significant emphasis on teacher and staff development; a need to provide opportunity for teachers and other staff people to find oases, where in the quiet and the calm they could reexamine that which they had done and consider that which they were being called upon or were responding voluntarily to do in order to make the district more responsive to its clients. Hence the notion of doing things as they had always been done has given way to the requirement for change. In large measure change and retraining for change has been strongly supported by the Federation of Teachers, Local 59, the exclusive bargaining agent, and by the CMEA, which is the NEA affiliate, which does not have the authority now, based on an election, but which also has stood in strong support of the efforts of the school district.

The traditional inservice model wasn't working particularly well for us. We knew this in the period when we were developing the Southeast Alternatives Program, with its 2,100 students in six schools - elementary, junior and senior high school. We thought we needed a new way to develop a process. We needed to develop an opportunity for teachers to learn new skills without threat, or intimidation, or the uncomfortableness which comes to any of us when we know we ought to go and relearn, or ought to go and expose ourselves to someone or something that knows more than we know. That has never been a comfortable thing for me to do and it certainly wasn't for many others who recognized similar retraining needs.

The new delivery system for inservice training in Minneapolis began in 1972, when the Teacher Center was first developed to serve the Southeast Alternatives sector. The Center's specific charge was to meet the training needs of faculty and parents, to involve them in providing a number of alternatives at the elementary and the secondary level; and to do it effectively, to the end that we could prove that we were capable of judiciously expending a significant amount of federal money to improve educational opportunities for Minneapolis students.

A year later, the Southeast Teacher Center became the Minneapolis Public Schools University of Minnesota Teacher Center with new duties as well as a new relationship. The new Center, operating with funds from both the school district and the university, began to participate in new curriculum development at both the school and the college level, blending preservice and inservice training. It became a broker to and of people and

services between the two institutions. It provided new roles for teachers and community people by way of temporary assignments to the Center, to which they could go and examine and determine how better to meet the requirements imposed upon them as principals, consultants, teachers or students or parents.

Now a satellite Teacher Center has been developed in the East Area of Minneapolis, and it is that grant which Mark Tucker spoke of specifically. Teacher centers weren't invented in Minneapolis - you know that. The unique aspect of the Minneapolis Teacher Centers, in my judgment, is that the consumer determines to a great extent what it is that he or she needs to be part of a changing educational institution.

The consumers -- the teachers or principals or parents or teacher aides -- decide what they need to know and how they want to get it. Then, by submitting a brief written proposal, they ask a grant-making, decision-making governing board of their fellow teachers and parents for the money and the means to get the training they want. In the East Area, this governing board is composed of eight parents selected from the community (two from each of the four schools served by the Center), an equal number of teachers, and one principal selected by his or her colleagues from the four participating schools. This board sets the guidelines. This board makes the decisions. We believe there will be a multiplying effect in terms of the experiences of those who ask the Center to arrange training opportunities. Training is for varying periods of time dependent upon the project.

This model encourages risk taking, because no one has to

admit a professional deficiency to those higher in the administrative structure. I want to illustrate that in just a moment by the chart. This model serves everyone - teachers, aides, principals, parents. All have a stake in it. They all have a voice in its services and projects. This kind of ownership captures and motivates people as no other management strategy can, in my judgment. It gives strong support and impetus to efforts to bring about major changes, and to preserve and press forward on those major changes, which I believe have made Minneapolis schools, to some degree, unique in terms of a relatively large city's public schools.

The Teacher Center serves as an "influence agency" for the development of the schools' programs; but it has no controlling role over the administration of a given school.

The goals of the district are easily assimilated in the Centers. The Centers become support systems, helping systems, to see that these goals are accomplished. An added bonus is the potential ripple effect which we already have some evidence of, but could not generalize from in terms of certainty.

These benefits, as set forth by those who are my colleagues and are in the Teacher Center delivery system, include the potential for developing a special university project where there is a real trade-off of services and benefits between the University and the school district. The alienations and the distances have been too great, in my judgment, in the past.

NIE has made provision for documentation and analysis of the East Area Teacher Center project. I met last week with the investigators, and I was impressed with the intensity of their

interrogatories and also with the knowledge they revealed of the fact that public schools are different institutions and need special attentions and special arrangements.

I have some feelings of uneasiness that the evaluation will not attempt to find out whether there was, in fact, an effect on the students and how much more they learned than they might have learned had we stayed with traditional patterns, although we produce each year in our city a profile of student performance for every school. I don't place particular stock in that, although our students do as well as those in any system - the key is what individuals do within the system.

There is evidence also, again which can't be generalized, of enthusiasm on the part of teachers and principals to get training time in the Centers, that attitudinal change has come about.

Now let me just show you on this chart how the Teacher Centers fit into the system. This is the Minneapolis Schools, and starting at the left with the Minneapolis line is the Board and the superintendent. Actually, I really think that in terms of my involvement the parallel line over here should have the University president, with whom we made the first contractual arrangement, and the dean of the college would be working with the deputy superintendent - that is my great colleague, Harry Vakos.

All around is the total community, and I want to say to you that increasingly our faculty and staff have learned how to respond to a variety of demands on the part of community. There is a comfortableness that never was existent before in

terms of our people meeting, conferring and talking. In some situations, teachers perspective to a given school faculty have been interviewed by parent groups. Principals in many cases recently have appeared before a parent group - not that the group has had the authority to make final decision, but rather that it wants to convey what is expected in terms of behavior and attitude and approach to those who aspire to become teachers or principals in those given schools. In the last analysis, the authority is with the superintendent and the School Board; but the intervention is significant.

Here, then, is the community which elects eight people to the Teacher Center Board. Here is the West Area, here is the North Area, here is the East Area and here is the Southeast Alternatives area. That is, the school district with its four geographic areas, with area superintendents and a director of the Southeast Alternatives. The Southeast Alternatives Project next September will be included in the West Area and this line will be dropped out. Here are the paraprofessionals and the support personnel. Here are the teachers, principals and the area superintendents. Obviously that should be inverted, but in traditional ways that is the line and staff.

Here is the Teacher Center Board, drawing its authority from the appointments of school administration and the sanction of the Board of Regents of the University and that President through the Dean, and here is the central Teacher Center Board, to which my colleague Fred Hayen, director of the University of Minnesota/Minneapolis Public School Teacher Center, reports.

Here we hope other centers will be created to serve the

North and West Areas.

The point I want to make is that this chart should show easy access to training at any level and without requirement for lots of base touching. In other words, teachers can move quite comfortably horizontally without going on up the structure of the system. They file their own applications for admission. They move laterally in. There isn't tremendous pressure imposed upon them. I am sure that the thoughtful teacher will touch base with his or her principal. The thoughtful director will let an area superintendent know he or she is applying. There is a self-generating and creative and easy access through these openings into the Center. Once people get in, they may discover that the principal from some school has applied and is in, that there are a couple of teacher aides, one parent and five or seven other teachers in for varying reasons to do their thing for a week, two weeks, five weeks, seven weeks -- it depends on what the project is. I should say that I do not mean "in" literally, for although the Teacher Center arranges for training, the training takes place in a variety of locations and settings.

And then there is easy access out and not a lot of tension and pressure. The teacher, or the paraprofessional, or the parent - each has done what he or she wanted to do. Each has done it, however, within the guidelines which are set forth here, by the School Board. There will be no violation in terms of letting people go in with an effort to disorient the major thrust of the school district as set by the Board of Education. But there is, nonetheless, a high level of tolerance with

respect to what they may carry in as their purpose for study.

I think I will let it go at that with one statement further, and that is that this transference of a governmental control process does, it seems to me, suggest a much more viable way for us to orient ourselves to the multitude of new tasks which are imposed upon those of us in public education.

JBD:cl 7/7/75
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